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## Rereading Romanticism, Rereading Expressivism: Revising "Voice" through Wordsworth's *Prefaces*

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# REREADING ROMANTICISM, REREADING EXPRESSIVISM: REVISING “VOICE” THROUGH WORDSWORTH’S PREFACES

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To take up the idea of critical expressivism is to insist upon complexity, contradiction, revision, and expansion, rather than reduction, dismissal, and simplification. Being critically expressivist too then involves a stance toward how we shape disciplinary histories. Current-traditional, expressivist, social constructionist—these are meant to signal broad and sure shifts in the foundations of writing pedagogy and disciplinarity. While these camps might render a telos or progress narrative, they at the same time inevitably diminish practice and concepts. There is imprecision in monolithic terms—expressivism, social constructionism, the personal, the social, romanticism—because, as Peter Elbow writes in this volume, these broad terms conceal their multiplicity. Equally unproductive, the terms are often wielded as weapons, as instruments of reduction and dismissal. As this essay works to point out, pedagogies and rhetorics are deemed untenable because they are labeled romantic or expressivist, or romantic-expressivist. This essay works to complicate these alliances.

Over time, composition scholars have found both resonance and dissonance with romanticism. While some have found romantic influence a reason to dismiss certain practices or pedagogies, still others have drawn upon the romantic period to invigorate our conceptions of expressivism. Finding the British romantic period a productive historical site, in this essay I suggest that nuance can be brought to understanding how expressivism, through romanticism, might understand language as “personal.” Through the canonical text on language in the Romantic period, Wordsworth’s *Prefaces to Lyrical Ballads* and theories of language circulating in the romantic period, I offer a means of seeing romantic—and by extension, expressive—language and expression in a novel way. Establishing connections between Wordsworth’s *Prefaces* and the work of Peter Elbow make it possible to understand that language emanates not from the radically isolated individual (as the most familiar cultural understandings of romanticism would have it), but from immersion in the physical world. Understanding

romantic-expressivist language in this way illuminates under-theorized aspects of language in the expressivist tradition, including the role of the physical body in writing, as well as the role of sense experience, presence, and physical location. Most significantly perhaps, this rereading complicates the field's often obsessive disavowals of the idea of voice in writing. Finally, this reimagined romantic conception of language brings productive complication to the most familiar and over-simplified divides between expressivism and constructionism, a goal of many contributors in this volume.

## READING ROMANTICISM FOR COMPOSITION STUDIES

Since its disciplinary beginnings, composition studies has forged curious links to romanticism. Linda Flower, for example, in her textbook *Problem-Solving Strategies for Writers*, defines her problem-solving view of writing in opposition to what she deems a particularly romantic version of invention. The romantic model of writing, exemplified by Coleridge's "Kubla Kahn," she suggests, posits writing as effortless, mysterious, and as the domain of genius. Wanting to emphasize "learnability," Flower defines her rational, problem solving approach as the only reasonable alternative to Coleridge's (and by extension, romanticism's) seeming creative mysticism, its "myth of inspiration" (Flower, 1989, p.41). Accepting Coleridge's conception of writing, after all, would mean the writer isn't able to learn to write at all. For Flower, Coleridge, and romanticism more broadly, is big trouble for invention and big trouble for writing instruction.

Tethered to familiar romantic cultural tropes of original genius, mysticism, and inspiration, Coleridge, and more generally familiar "romantic" conceptions of writing, have become sites against which some compositionists have defined our disciplinary pursuits. Among the most familiar of these voices include Richard E. Young, who works to separate rhetoric's pursuits from a particularly resonant word on theories of Romantic invention, vitalism. "Vitalist assumptions, inherited from the Romantics," Young matter-of-factly states,

with [their] stress on the natural powers of the mind and the uniqueness of the creative act, leads to a repudiation of the possibility of teaching the composing process, hence the tendency of current-traditional rhetoric to become a critical study of the products of composing and an art of editing. Vitalist assumptions become most apparent when we consider what is excluded from the present discipline that had earlier been included, the most obvious and significant exclusion being the art of invention. (2009, p. 398)

Vitalist influence for Young is then simultaneously romantic and detrimental to rhetoric's pursuits. Both Flower and Young offer shorthand conceptions of romantic ideas that they assume endure in culture, influencing writing students and teachers of writing. Moreover, they define this romantic influence antithetically to the pursuits of composition studies. From this viewpoint, to purport pedagogies or rhetorics inflected with romantic assumptions is to be backward—as Young says, romantic-vitalist assumptions put focus on products and take us back to the debunked, product-centered days of current-traditionalism. Indeed, as Hawk points out, composition scholars have most often used romanticism as “a category ... in the discipline for identifying and excluding particular rhetorical practices” (Hawk, 2007, p. 1). Quickly naming a concept in composition studies “romantic” has then, on one hand, become shorthand in composition studies for dismissal and obsolescence.

On the other hand, though, and often working to problematize these quick links, many compositionists have conversely found the romantic period a fruitful site for contextualizing and expanding some of our disciplinary concerns. Berlin, Hawk, Fishman and McCarthy, and Gradin, to name a few, bring complexity and dimension to the relationship between composition and romanticism primarily through close readings of primary romantic texts and figures. James Berlin, for example, in “The Rhetoric of Romanticism” questions the grounds on which Young and others have made “Romanticism—and, by implication Coleridge—responsible for the erosion of rhetoric as a discipline” (1980, p. 62). Berlin close reads the primary texts of Coleridge to arrive at the conclusion that “many of the objections made to Coleridge’s view of rhetoric would be rendered nugatory if those making them would realize that Coleridge does not demean rhetorical activity in favor of the poetic” (1980, p. 72). The close reading of primary romantic texts and figures reveals productive insights on the nuance of Coleridge’s considerations of rhetoric and poetic. Byron Hawk performs similar, sustained close readings in order to understand differently the traditionally romantic concept of vitalism. Though he includes Coleridge on the way, Hawk reworks romantic influence by contextualizing vitalism in a history much longer than just the romantic period, extending it toward complexity theory (2007, p. 259). His book complicates the often-easy ways romanticism gets linked to composition. The result of these “closer looks” at romantic texts and ideas is a more nuanced understanding romantic writers and cultural ideals and an invigorated concept in composition. For Hawk, a more nuanced conception of vitalism opens space for him to reimagine pedagogy that fits “our current electronic context and the complex ecologies in which students write and think and situates these practices within a contemporary vitalist paradigm of complexity” (2007, p. 10). While there has been a habit of using romanticism to

undermine certain schools of composition thought, romanticism can be equally generative, bringing new light to pervasive questions or conventional composition wisdoms. In the broadest sense, in this essay, I continue this productive act of looking back to romanticism to question the tacit ways in which expressivism has been tenuously linked to certain thin versions of romanticism.

Like vitalism, expressivism has garnered strong connections between composition and romanticism; naming expressivism “romantic,” scholars have attempted to make it out of time, untenable, and passé. Lester Faigley, for example, implicitly weaves expressivism with romanticism in “Competing Theories of Process: A Critique and a Proposal.” Faigley describes expressivism exclusively in romantic terms: expressivist and romantic figures become advocates of the other, such that romantic figures somehow anticipate and embody tenets of expressivist pedagogy. Faigley narrates these implicit connections by first naming Rohman and Wlecke “instigators of a ‘neo-Romantic’ view of process;” Peter Elbow is described as subscribing to the romantic theory “that ‘good’ writing does not follow the rules but reflects the processes of creative imagination” (1986, p. 530). And paradigmatic romantic figures make arguments about expressivism: “at times Wordsworth and to a lesser extent Coleridge seem to argue that expressivism precludes all intentionality” (1986, p. 530). In this way, Faigley’s description of expressivist rhetoric doesn’t argue for its romantic inflections, but makes this connection implicit. In his later work (Faigley, 1992) questions expressivism especially on its theorization of subjectivity,<sup>1</sup> finding it out of sync with the reign of postmodern subjectivity which, like other social constructivist-leaning compositionists, pushes him toward seeing language as shared social material rather than the domain of the individual. Here, yoking expressivism to romanticism ultimately becomes, as it did for Flower and Young, a means of undermining expressivist rhetorics.

Faigley finds the romantic-expressivist notion of selfhood problematic and ultimately finds ground for favoring social constructionist formulations of self and language. As Chris Burnham writes, “Faigley argues that expressivism’s romantic view of the self is philosophically and politically retrograde, making it ineffectual in postmodern times. Further, expressivism’s concern with the individual and authentic voice directs students away from social and political problems in the material world” (2001, p. 28). Burnham encapsulates how expressivism is most often defined against social constructionism. Expressivism, this broad juxtaposition tends to go, constructs a coherent self with a radically unique voice, while constructionism recognizes fragmented subjectivity and the sociality of language.

The link of expressivism to romanticism is, I suggest, in part from where this oversimplified binary emanates. Theories of language and selfhood tend to

sharply divide constructionism from expressivism on the basis of expressivism's implicit links to versions of romantic theories of language and expression. Berlin—in spite of the nuanced way he understands romanticism and rhetoric—illustrates these connections; Gradin notes that Berlin is “almost single-handedly responsible” (1995, p. 2) for the divisions observed in contemporary rhetorics of expressivism, social constructionism, and cognitivism. As Berlin categorizes rhetorics and their histories in *Rhetoric and Reality*, he first links “expressionist rhetoric” emergent in the era of progressive education with “Brahminical romanticism” (1987, p. 73), a rhetoric devoted uniquely to the individual. From this perspective, in romantic-expressionistic rhetorics “the writer is trying to express—the content of knowledge—is the product of a private and personal vision that cannot be expressed in normal, everyday language” (1987, p. 74). In this description, romanticism, expressivism, and the idea of private language are consolidated. Later in his history Berlin writes that expressionistic rhetoric, or what he calls the “subjective rhetoric” of the 1960s and 70s,” held the

conviction that reality is a personal and private construct. For the expressionist, truth is always discovered within, through an internal glimpse, an examination of the private inner world. In this view the material world is only lifeless matter. The social world is even more suspect because it attempts to coerce individuals into engaging in thoughtless conformity. (1987, p. 145)

Berlin again emphasizes that in expressivist rhetorics, language and expression are thought to emanate from within the individual. Expression is deemed to be radically individual, unique and avoiding (or ignoring) influence from both the material and, by extension, social world. Berlin, ultimately an advocate of social constructionism, is quick then to explain how this inward-turned paradigm “denies the place of intersubjective, social processes in shaping language” (1987, p. 146). Put more plainly, social constructionists accuse expressivism of understanding language as individual, a private language that is supposed to be true and radically unique. Social constructionists, by contrast, see language as the province of the social group and thus there can be no purely personal truth or unique expression.

Taken together, Faigley and Berlin are constructionists who define themselves against expressivism on the issue of from “where” language emanates. Patricia Bizzell too echoes this distinction when she discusses the difference between outer and inner directed theorists:

one theoretical camp sees writing as primarily inner-directed, and so is interested more in the structure of language-learning

and thinking processes in their earliest state, prior to social influence. The other main theoretical camp sees writing as primarily outer-directed, and so is more interested in the social processes whereby language-learning and thinking capacities are shaped and used in particular communities. (1992, p. 77)

Associating expressivism with romanticism enhances this divide. In the next section, I reread romanticism to complicate our sense of romantic expression.

## **REREADING ROMANTICISM: WORDSWORTH'S PREFACES TO LYRICAL BALLADS**

This essay argues that romanticism can be an illuminating historical period for composition studies, laden as it is with theories of creativity, language, and subjectivity. In particular, as some compositionists have already demonstrated, taking a closer look at romantic texts complicates the dichotomy between expressivism and social constructionism. Steve Fishman, for example, aligns the writings of Elbow and German Romantic philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder, suggesting ultimately that "it was the social reform dimension of German romanticism that inspired expressivism" (1992, p. 647). This revised lineage provides a means of understanding expressivism's relation to the social. Fishman suggests that Herder and Elbow "stress the integration of personal life and public expression," understand expression as "the start of our dialogue with others," and are "critical of the exclusionary quality of academic discourse" (1992, p. 651). Fishman's comparative reading of Elbow and Herder leads him to understand both romanticism as a movement and Elbow as an expressivist figure in a new light: neither romanticism nor expressivism should be seen as asocial; instead, the emphasis on the individual's relation to the broader political and social community. In this way then, Fishman eases the dichotomy between expressivism and constructionism, understanding the focus on the personal as implicitly a focus on the social.

So too does Gradin, in her book-length second look at romanticism, seek ways to ease the divides between expressivism, feminism, and social constructionism. To accomplish this, like Fishman, Gradin revisits romantic primary texts primarily to see within romantic philosophies an investment in the social. Unlike Fishman however, she turns to highly visible figures from the English tradition, particularly Wordsworth and Coleridge, as she suggests that these figures "were much more directly influential on American educational thought than were the Germans" (Gradin, 1995, p. xvii). Overall, Gradin finds a productive thread running from romanticism to expressivism especially in the romantic the-

ories of imagination (1995, p. 38) and in the ways romantics theorized education (“the importance of the individual; the importance of personal experience; and an emphasis on activity as opposed to passivity” (1995, p. 36)). Like Gradin, I turn back to a familiar romantic, William Wordsworth, but with a different goal. In theories of language from the period and from the pinnacle statement on language in the period, Wordsworth’s *Preface(s)* and Appendix to *Lyrical Ballads*, I question the easy assumption that romantic-expressivist language is thought to emanate from the interior of the unique, isolated individual. Instead, the *Prefaces* suggest that language and meaning is found in of the sensuous world of physical experience. Following Fishman and Berlin’s reading of Coleridge, depth and insight can come from careful micro-focused reading.

In order to glean from Wordsworth’s *Prefaces* a novel way of understanding romantic expression, it’s helpful to contextualize his work in conversations about language’s origins popular in this period. In the eighteenth century, language became a philosophical “problem.” Inquiries into the nature and the origin of language, including the relationship of physical, worldly things to language, accumulated. According to Hans Aarsleff, “language study” in this period “even when called philology,” was not merely a matter of knowing the forms, syntax, phonology, historical relationships, and other aspects of particular languages. It involved questions of wider significance. What, for instance, was the origin of thought? Did the mind have a material basis? Did mankind have a single origin? (1967, p. 4). Considerations of language in the romantic period were also an opportunity to consider mind, thought, being, and knowledge. In these theories, many hypothesized a physical, embodied basis for language in early human interactions and interactions with the physical environment.<sup>2</sup> This broad sense that language has physical and material bases, provides the central premise of the work of Horne Tooke, the most important and popular language theorist in the period, to advance what would become a popular (Aarsleff, 1967, p. 73), provoking, lightning-rod text.

Tooke’s *Diversions of Purley* published first in 1786, reissued in 1798 and released with a second volume in 1805 (dates which correspond with Romanticism’s heyday) posits the most simplified version of language which argues that both language’s origins and contemporary language systems are based in the material world. Completely undermining arbitrariness and fully embracing empiricist sensation, Tooke’s “linguistic materialism” (McKusick, 1986, p. 12) deploys elaborate etymologies to show how words are immediately the signs of material things and concepts or what he calls “abbreviations” of them. Says Aarsleff, “Naming is the essence of language as Tooke had shown by tracing all words via etymology to the names of sensible objects” (1967, p. 94). Etymological analysis shows how parts in words correspond to the way we associate our



physical experience with these things in the world; for example, Tooke offers “bar” as example meaning “defence,” and then goes on to explain that a ‘barn’ is a covered enclosure, a ‘baron,’ a powerful man, ‘barge,’ a strong boat, etc. (Tooke, 1847). This simple idea that “all words can be reduced to names of sensations” was quite popular and tapped into some of the major concerns of the moment. In claiming that language is implicitly connected to physical experience in the world, Tooke’s pervasive and popular thoughts on language carried many implications for romantic thought. One such implication is language’s relationship to education. If language is out there in the material world, and not the domain of mind and education, rationality is dislodged from its centrality in matters of thinking and speaking. Olivia Smith helps articulate this implication for education as she states, “if sensation and feeling are the basis of vocabulary and all modes of thought, then experience and perception become reputable forms of knowledge and can no longer be described as essentially different from rationality and abstraction” (1984, p. 213).

Taking up the popular interest in language, Wordsworth’s famous poetic experiment, *Lyrical Ballads*, with its explanatory prefaces and appendix, founds Romanticism as a movement. As is commonly remembered, recited in fact, Wordsworth’s Advertisement to the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* describes the poetry collection as an experiment as to “how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure.” And thus, language becomes central, but not so central, to Romanticism as a literary movement. I say, “not-so” as an acknowledgement to the fact that while language is the experiment so touted, it is not what is often considered “revolutionary” about this text. Rather in more conventional readings of Romanticism, feeling seems to overshadow language’s sensuousness. However, especially in light of Tooke’s theory—published and republished as it was just before Wordsworth’s first publication of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798—Wordsworth’s *Prefaces* participate in the origin of language debates by arguing that expression suited to poetry should be saturated not with the unique emanations of the genius poet, as is often thought, but instead this expression should reveal the physical, inhabited world of the speaker.

One place to see Hooke’s theory of language reflected is in Wordsworth’s articulation of his experiment in the 1802 preface. Here Wordsworth shifts the terms of his language revolution to “a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation” and “a selection of language really used by men” (Preface to 1802). I want to here really lean on that new phrase “vivid sensation” and link it to Tooke’s theory of language. Wordsworth advocates for language that emerges in relation to physical, material, natural encounters. Rather than language being abstract, poetical language should emerge from context, sensation, and feeling.

Moreover, as Gradin's work details, Wordsworth had particular liberatory ideas about education and the social classes. For his poetic experiment, he focuses on "low and rustic life" as the subject and speakers of many of his poems. Wordsworth focuses on the lives of the "rustics" as a poetic ideal because, he writes, "in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer more emphatic language" and because "such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived" (Preface to 1802). Like Tooke, Wordsworth believes that expression should not be trained, rational, and abstract; which is to say in another way that poetry should no longer follow neoclassical rules. Instead, expression should emerge from lived experience; facility with language and expression comes best from those who can "hourly communicate" with the physical world.

The Appendix to the 1802 *Lyrical Ballads* too dramatizes Wordsworth's theory of romantic expression. To begin, Wordsworth thinks back to the origins of poetry first stating, "The earliest Poets of all nations generally wrote from passion excited by real events; they wrote naturally, and as men" (Appendix to 1802). By contrast, he sees in his immediate predecessors the mechanization of poetic language. These poets produce language without the influence of sense experience:

desirous of producing the same effect, without having the same animating passion, set themselves to a mechanical adoption of those figures of speech, and made use of them, sometimes with propriety, but much more frequently applied them to feelings and ideas with which they had no natural connection whatsoever. A language was thus insensibly produced, differing materially from the real language of men in any situation. (Appendix to 1802.)

Wordsworth's poetic experiment is in this way a critique of poetic expression that fails to rely on physical sensation and physical experience with the world. He wants poets to express language having a "natural connection" to one's real, lived experience in the world. He is against "a language ... thus insensibly produced" (Appendix to 1802), against language that's hollow and abstracted. This phrase—"insensibly produced" language—echoes Tooke's theory of language. Wordsworth aligns with Tooke by understanding language as emergent from the world of experience, sense, and feeling. Wordsworth's "rustics," close to nature and "hourly communicat[ing] with the best objects from which the best part of language originally derived" (Preface to 1802) become the expressive ideal. This theory of romantic language and expression, as shaped by close readings of Wordsworth and Tooke, sees words as fundamentally "out there," accessed

through physiological sensation and feeling. Rather than assuming that romantic expression as isolated and inward-looking, this second look at the most canonical of Wordsworth's thinking shows instead that expressive-romantic expression looks decidedly outwardly, toward first-person, embodied, sense experience, as if writers were "standing in a landscape of language" (Smith, 1984, p. 215).

## REREADING EXPRESSIVISM: ANOTHER LENS FOR "VOICE" IN WRITING

By taking this second look at romantic theories of language, the "expression" in expressivism can look substantially different. By expanding on the tacit link that Berlin and others have made between expressivism and romanticism through close reading of a canonical romantic text, some of Berlin's foundational and lasting assertions about expressivism denying the social and valuing the inwardness of unique expression could be challenged. For one, this rereading of Wordsworth goes some distance in undoing certainty about the supposed inwardness of language in romantic philosophies. It is useful also to cut through these binary impulses more directly by applying Wordsworth's romantic theory of language directly to a still percolating debate about the idea of voice in writing. I want to expand the possibilities for understanding language and voice, and ultimately then, expand our senses of the "expressivist tradition."

There are few more vexed concepts in composition, and in expressivism more specifically, than voice. Linked to this concept are debates about subjectivity and selfhood, structures of power, and theories of language. Most stable about this concept seems to be its unrelenting persistence and imprecision. As Peter Elbow writes in *Voice in Writing Again: Embracing Contraries*, critiques of voice "seem valid, yet voice stays alive, even in the most "naïve" forms that have been the most powerfully critiqued" (2007, p. 3). Darcie Bowden, among the most vociferous critics of the voice metaphor, echoes this ambivalence: "the permutations and varying conceptions of voice, especially during the 1970s and 1980s, make voice difficult to completely support or to completely reject as a useful metaphor for textual analysis or for pedagogy" (1999, p. vii). Voice has become a key site for debate in liberatory, feminist, expressivist, and multicultural rhetorics, as "voice is a pivotal metaphor in composition and rhetoric studies [as it] focuses attention on authorship, on identity, on narrative, and on power" (Bowden, 1999, p. viii). While voice in general endures as a concept, there are nonetheless voices in the field that, like Faigley, understand voice as matter-of-factly untenable in our current postmodernist, poststructuralist framework. Mimi Orner, for example, scrutinizes the idea of voice in liberatory education rhetorics, claiming plainly that "calls for 'authentic student voice' contain realist and essentialist

epistemological positions regarding subjectivity which are neither acknowledged specifically nor developed theoretically” (1992, p. 75). Voice, under this critique, implies stable identity and personal language. Writes Orner, “discourses on student voice are premised on the assumption of a fully conscious, fully speaking, ‘unique, fixed, and coherent’ self” (Orner, 1992, p. 79). Bowden, on similar theoretical grounds, argues that voice has lived past its usefulness as her whole book rests on the “assumption that that there can be no such thing as voice, that it was a metaphor of particular historical moment, and that that moment has passed” (1999, p. viii). The idea of voice in writing becomes most vigorously critiqued when voice is said to reveal a unique individual and when language is thought to reveal the self, each accusations leveled at expressivist voice in general.

Keeping Wordsworth’s desire for expression to be saturated with experience in mind, we can understand Peter Elbow’s concern with voice as a concern with physical reality and experience; that is, voice in Elbow and more broadly across expressivist thinking, can be understood not as transcendent personal truth or unique expression, but instead as alive, embodied language that sounds like a real human person is speaking. Using Wordsworth’s romantic theory of language as a backdrop highlights Elbow’s concern with the physical body, the spoken voice, and attention to contexts for speaking.

To begin seeing this physical nuance in expressivist voice, I look back to Elbow’s 1968 essay “A Method for Teaching Writing.” This essay describes Elbow’s experience helping conscientious objectors writing petitions to avoid the draft. Much of how Elbow talks about voice and expression in this essay is echoed in how Wordsworth talks about poetic language in his *Prefaces*. Central to this essay is Elbow’s concern for writing that is “alive” (1968, p. 122). Evidence of life in written language is, for Elbow, “when words carry the sound of a person” (1968, p. 122). Like Wordsworth, then, Elbow emphasizes the importance of language sounding true to one’s lived experience, the words uttered in the experienced world—or as Wordsworth might say, the “real language of men in any situation” (Appendix to 1802). Moreover, Elbow explicitly values language connected to experience, explaining that “everyone does have a ‘word-hoard’: a collection of words that are connected to his strong and primary experiences in the world—as opposed to words which (putting it inexactly) are only connected to other words” (1968, p. 120). With a focus on language relating to physical experience in the material world, Elbow here cites Vygotsky’s *Thought and Language* on the difference between spontaneous and scientific concepts. Just as Elbow briefly explains, spontaneous or “everyday” concepts “are the meanings of words of everyday language, which a child uses in everyday life/interaction, while scientific concepts are the ones the child masters during systematic instruction of basic knowledge” (Temina-Kingsolver, 2008). Implicit then in Elbow’s suggestion of

writer's "word-hoards" is the idea that language has an explicit connection to worldly experience, aligning with the romantic-expressivist conception of language as having a material, physical basis.

There is much made about how expressivism falsely supposes that one can access through language a transcendent self or personal truth. Mimi Orner, writing on voice in liberatory rhetorics, argues that "calls for student voice in education presume students, voices, and identities to be singular, unchanging and unaffected by the context in which the speaking occurs" (1992, p. 80). In "A Method for Teaching Writing," an essay that could be categorized under liberatory rhetorics, Elbow moves away from this side of the voice concept, explaining again more of a concern with physical bodies in the real world. Elbow writes:

but I am not talking about intimate, autobiographical "self-exposure" when I talk of "revealing a self in words." Writing in words which "reveal the self" has nothing necessarily to do with exposing intimacies—undressing. For I am talking about the sound or feel of a believable person simply in the fabric of the words ... the most impersonal reasoning—in lean, laconic, "unrevealing" prose—can nevertheless be alive and infused with the presence of a person or a self. (1968, p. 123)

Elbow here is very clear that he's not interested in personal truths or confessions, but with getting words on the page that are saturated with experience, words that come out of the body, not ones conceived of in a purely intellectual way, not from that tissue of words only connected to other words.

There is certainly more to say about Elbow's takes on voice across his work but in this 1968 essay it becomes very clear that voice has fundamentally to do with the body and sense experience. But this embodied basis for voice is somewhat under-theorized in Elbow's own considerations and the more general ways voice circulates as a concept in our field. In his most recent, extensive consideration of physical voice too, *Vernacular Eloquence*, Elbow only seems to narrowly suggest that his interest in the speaking voice and the natural pacing of intonation units has something to do with the body and with language being connected to the physical world. Sounding a lot like Wordsworth in the *Prefaces*, Elbow's mission in the book is to shift the paradigm of literate culture: "our culture of literacy functions as though it were a plot against the spoken voice, the human body, vernacular language, and those without privilege" (2012, p. 7). But only in one section does Elbow attempt to consider the implications of embodiment theory. Occasionally, he will make mention of the embodied nature of language, such as, "our longest and usually deepest experience of how words carry meaning

involves felt bodily experience, not just intellectual understanding” (2012, p. 252). Beyond this though, the voice in expressivism has remained mostly disembodied. Putting new focus on romantic primary texts reveals a way to understand romantic expression as experiential and physical. Rereading romanticism in this way helps us disrupt the sticky sense that expressivism is about radically unique self-expression and even that language is the domain of each individual. Rather, another version of romantic expressivist version of voice only really asks that writer’s “put their body where their words are” (Elbow, 2012, p. 253).

Elbow has tirelessly reexamined voice in his own thinking, as well as in the thinking of his critics. This view of voice as seen above encapsulates Elbow’s most recent emphasis on voice as spoken, lived, and embodied. And this embodied dimension of voice seems to be something Bowden can agree with Elbow on. Bowden takes a whole chapter of her book to “detach the literal voice from the metaphorical one” (1999, p. 82) and demonstrate the usefulness of this to reading practices: “the only useful application of voice may stem from an understanding of how the literal voice operates in reading” (Bowden, 1999, p. 83). Bowden’s chapter in support of literal voice has her sounding very much like Elbow in her recommendations to enlist the spoken voice for interpretation and revision. Bowden writes: “reading aloud helps writers and readers tap into their aural imaging, and understand at a visceral level the rhythms, contours, and tones of a written text” (1999, p. 97). Amidst the restless ground of voice then, Bowden, Elbow, and Wordsworth find a common ground in the idea that written expression has a basis in the embodied and physical voice.

A rereading of romanticism highlights a way of conceptualizing voice and language in the expressivist tradition in a way that emphasizes its physicality, rather than its inwardness. This in turn complicates the easy ways expressivism is divided from social constructionism. Romantic theories of language value first-person experience, but experiential and sense experience instead of uniqueness or transcendence. Moreover, looking back to romanticism provides another, under-theorized way of considering language that can also disrupt the expressivism/constructionism binary.

The romantics conceived of language and meaning as fundamentally embodied and material. Wordsworth and Tooke’s romantic theories of language create an under-theorized connection from romanticism to composition. This emphasis can be linked to current work in composition. For example, Sondra Perl’s conception of felt sense would be a site at which language is understood as a physical act. Working from the philosophies of Eugene Gendlin, Perl’s conception of felt sense “calls attention to what is just on the edge of our thinking but not yet articulated in words” (2004, p. xiii), a view that there is meaning, located in the body, prior to and informing of language. Perl suggests “that language and

meaning are connected to inchoate, bodily intuitions” (2004, p. xvii). Perl ends up nodding to an expressivist tradition here too, positing the physical body as a site of fresh and “true” expression. Tapping into felt sense in this way echoes expressivist practice in which the body’s “natural” rhythms might resonate with lived experience. This embodied view of language is further elaborated in the work of Lakoff and Johnson. *Metaphors We Live By* kicks off their exploration of the embodied foundations of language, demonstrating that metaphors aren’t specialized language but have implicit physical dimensions. Johnson, in his book *The Meaning of the Body: Aesthetics of Human Understanding*, writes “an embodied view of meaning looks for the origins and structures of meaning in the organic activities of embodied creatures in interaction with their changing environments” (2007, p. 11). Much more than a cognitive engagement with language, Johnson suggests, “meaning reaches deep down into our corporeal encounter with our environment” (2007, p. 25). Johnson here echoes Wordsworth’s concern for “hourly communicating” with the physical world. If we see language as having a physical basis, the product of embodied human beings inhabiting a material world, how might we understand voice, expression, identity, and authorship differently?

## CONCLUSION: REVISING THE DIVIDES

If composition studies can be neatly divided into camps, paradigms, and pedagogies, there certainly will be some generalizing that doesn’t hold true in all cases. Expressivism, a historical time period and a set of informing orientations, certainly takes its fair share of overgeneralizing. As a complement to these broad disciplinary stories, we also engage in work on the micro-level, calling into question the way these broad camps divide us. As Hawk says, “counter-histories can always be drawn, and new groupings of texts, events, and practices can always be articulated. The goal of such a historiography is not simply to arrive at a more accurate image of the past but to create a particular affect in the present” (Hawk, 2007, p. 11). Looking back to romantic theories of language brings another more complex dimension to voice, expression, and the mythos of personal language that often sticks to conceptions of expressivism. While the broadest strokes tend to come from critics of expressivism, this revisionary move can even shift the grounds that expressivist advocates may stake for it. Chris Burnham for example describes “expressivism’s strength” as “its insistence that all concerns, whether individual, social, or political, must originate in personal experience and be documented in the student’s own language” (Burnham, 2001, p. 31). This is a familiar refrain about expressivism. But in the context of Wordsworth, how we understand “personal experience” and the “student’s own language”—some



of the most essential ways we have to talk generally about what expressivism is—is different. Personal experience, then, is not necessarily personal writing or self-expression, but writing infused with physical experience out in the world—first person experience, in other words, that doesn't lead necessarily to one's own singular language. Rather than seeing expressivist language as personal, unique, and transcendent, romantic texts make available a way of seeing language and expression as having fundamentally a material and embodied basis.

If language can be conceived as neither the domain of the individual or purely the social group, then some of the deepest divisions between constructionism and expressivism are eased. Especially as constructionism has branched off in our current moment to a focus on networks, location, situatedness, and material systems in ecological, post-process, and spatial theories, a revised sense of romantic-expressive language as material and embodied draws attention to a writer's always shifting physical location and relation with the world.

## NOTES

1. In *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*, Faigley “questions the existence of a rational, coherent self and the ability of the self to have privileged insight into its own process” (1992, p. 111).

2. Three essayists who considered the origins of language were Thomas Reid, Lord Monboddo, and Condillac. Thomas Reid thought that in language there are artificial as well as natural signs, and “particularly that the thoughts purposes, and dispositions of the mind have their natural signs in the face, the modulation of the voice, and motion and attitude of the body” (McKusick, 1986, p. 11) and without this natural meaning located in the body, “language could never have been established among men” (McKusick, 1986, p. 11). For Lord Monboddo, the process of language learning should begin with the natural, embodied signs and meanings and “only by means of them can the learner become oriented within the much larger class of conventional signs” (McKusick, 1986, p. 12). Condillac, by contrast, pushes the origins of language out in to the physical world. These thinkers' explanations of language's relationship to sense experience demonstrate the pervasiveness of this embodied, experiential view in the romantic period.

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